

April 2, 2004

Docket No. 04-06  
Communications Division  
Public Information Room, Mailstop 1-5  
Office of the Comptroller of the Currency  
250 E St. SW,  
Washington, DC 20219

Docket No. **R-1181**  
Jennifer J. Johnson  
Secretary  
Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System  
20<sup>th</sup> Street and Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20551

Robert E. Feldman  
Executive Secretary  
Attention: Comments  
Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation  
550 17<sup>th</sup> St NW  
Washington, DC 20429

Regulation Comments, Attention: No. 2004-04  
Chief Counsel's Office  
Office of Thrift Supervision  
1700 G Street NW  
Washington, DC 20552

Re: Comment on Changes to Community Reinvestment Act

Dear Officials of Federal Bank and Thrift Agencies:

On behalf of the National American Indian Housing Council (NAIHC), (Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe) would like to comment on proposed changes to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA) regulations. As a member of NAIHC, we do not support the proposed changes to the CRA. We feel that these changes would be contrary to the housing interests of Native Americans, and with our current challenges and struggle, we cannot afford any further hindrance in addressing the numerous housing and economic development issues.

Many people familiar with Indian Country are aware that in tribal areas, there are numerous social, economic and other issues requiring the attention and limited resources of tribal leaders. For this reason, it is necessary for non-tribal organizations, government agencies and policy makers to step up and take care of Native people. Part of this is ensuring that decision makers are aware of the special needs and concerns of Native people, thus, we believe changes to the CRA will have a negative influence on community reinvestment.

One reason the CRA was implemented was to increase homeownership and economic opportunities for typically underserved groups, including minority and low- or moderate-income populations. One group

that **is** not only **underserved**, but overlooked is Native Americans. **Standing** more than 2 million **strong**, First Americans have continually been last in line with it comes to progress. For example, whenever **the** Bush Administration's goal to **create** 5.5 million **new** minority homeowners by **the** end of the decade is mentioned, Native Americans and **Alaska Natives** are not **mentioned**—something unacceptable when you consider that there are 562 federally recognized tribes across **the** nation.

Furthermore, Native Americans, who **make** up **less** than **one percent** of the population, tend to **live** on **reservation** lands, where **horrid** living conditions fuel the feelings of **hopelessness** and **reflect** decades of being "forgotten." Thousands of families **across** the nation **hope** to have access to a decent home.

(**The** Saginaw Chippewa Tribe has a **successful** mortgage program in place for our Tribal Members to achieve homeownership. However, we have **only** one Lending Agency who stepped up **to offer** mortgages on Tribal Trust Land. One **lender** prohibits our Tribal Members' choices of lenders, as well as mortgage choices that are available to **the** general public. We are currently working to increase the **lender/mortgage** options available to our Tribal Members.

In **addition** to the mortgage program, we **still lack** adequate rental housing to meet the needs of **our** Tribal Elders and Tribal Members who do not want the responsibilities **of** homeownership. As a result of our **Tribe's** business **success**, Tribal Members are now non-income eligible for HUD low rent housing programs. Therefore it is imperative to have **programs** available by way of the **CRA** to achieve future housing development to meet **the** needs of those we serve.)

When **it** comes to **the** Native population, the proposed **CRA** changes would undercut the signs of progress that are just **now** coming to Indian Country. Just recently, with **studies** sharing data and new initiatives **drawing** attention to **Native** people, at long last lenders, community organizations and others are **tending** to the housing and economic needs of **Native** people. Over the years, the **CRA** has undoubtedly contributed to **this** **progress**, which is why we cannot watch **it all** disappear by supporting these proposed changes.

#### Statement of Position on Proposed Changes:

##### ***More Streamlined and Cursory Exams***

Current **CRA** regulations allow large bank with **assets** of at least \$250 million to be rated by performance evaluations which scrutinize their level of lending, investing, and services to low- and moderate-income communities. The proposed changes would eliminate the investment and service parts **of** the **CRA** exam for banks and thrifts with assets **between** \$250 and \$500 million, resulting in reduced access to banking services and capital for underserved communities. This **is** a major **concern** for Native communities where such services are already scarce. This will have a **disproportionate** effect on rural populations such as tribes.

Last year, NAIHC called for the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) and the banking community to better monitor regulators in order to reduce the number of predatory lending victims and consumers who have **no** choice but to use unscrupulous payday lenders. When entire communities have **no** or few choices to conduct their financial transactions, they may sometimes have no choice but to make use of the nearest or most convenient services—albeit, these expensive services may wind up creating a new cycle of victims. Particularly for people who are trapped by high-interest loans or fees for something as simple as cashing a check or borrowing money for an emergency. In tribal areas, where, 26% of residents are impoverished, it is difficult to find opportunities to buy a home or establish something as simple as a savings or checking account, because so few financial institutions are involved in Indian Country.

If these changes are accepted, these very banks would **no** longer be held accountable for the provision

of bank branches, checking accounts, Individual Development Accounts (IDAs), or debit card services. When it comes to banking services, the Native community—with many reservations in remote areas—deserves more locations, better hours and adequate federal regulation in order to maintain a satisfactory level of services.

Finally, banks would no longer be held accountable under CRA exams for investing in Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTC). These tax credits have been a great, and yet, underused housing program for tribes, many of whom seek additional funding sources to add to the minimal funding currently appropriated for Indian housing programs. Some tribes, such as the White Mountain Apache in Arizona, have used the program for the rehabilitation of rental units and development of both town homes and single-family rental homes. The value of the LIHTC program is supported by federal efforts to encourage private investment in the development of affordable housing, which decreases the federal tax liability for investors providing funding towards eligible housing projects.

### ***Predatory Lending Standard***

Proposed CRA changes would also increase predatory lending because abusive lending would not result in lower CRA ratings without leading to delinquency or foreclosure. In other words, Native borrowers could still have the income necessary for monthly payments, yet they might not be able to absorb a lender's excessive fees or unnecessary products.

The proposed standard states that loans based on the foreclosure value of the collateral, instead of the ability of the borrower to repay, can result in downgrades in CRA ratings. This standard does not cover many instances of predatory lending, and this is unacceptable, as there are numerous forms of predatory lending—including the packing of fees into mortgage loans, high prepayment penalties, and loan flipping.

To fight abusive lending, severe penalties and rigorous fair lending audits are necessary, so new and first-time Native American homeowners served by the Administration are protected, but the proposed predatory lending standard will not provide the necessary protections. In addition, an anti-predatory standard must apply to all loans made by the bank and all of its affiliates, not just real-estate secured loans issued by the bank in its "assessment area" as proposed by the agencies. By shielding banks from the consequences of abusive lending, the proposed standard will frustrate the CRA's statutory requirement that banks serve low- and moderate-income communities consistent with safety and soundness.

In 2003, NAIHC surveyed tribes and tribal housing entities on predatory lending in tribal areas. Conducted in partnership with the National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC), the resulting report brought much-needed attention to the hot issue of predatory lending in tribal areas.

### **More on Predatory Lending In Tribal Areas:**

- 52.9% of respondents believed lenders discriminated based on race and identified predatory lending in their tribal area as a serious concern.
- In the survey, the most frequently-cited predatory lending practices included abusive loans for purchasers of manufactured homes (48.6%) and for first-time homebuyers (35%).

Should these changes be made to the CRA, it's very likely that the incidences of foreclosure or bankruptcy would increase. Furthermore, why would we want to award more loans—with high interest and fees—to low-income people and those in areas without many job or economic opportunities? These proposed changes cannot be approved because they are unfair and wrong.

Right now, we **have too** many of our Native people being targeted for **abusive** and expensive mortgage loans. That is why **NAIHC** has embarked on two major initiatives, one to expand homebuyer education in Indian Country and **one** is a **\$10 million** campaign to boost Native homeownership and housing development.

***Tribes Pass Own Anti-Predatory Laws to Protect Their People:***

In **some** cases, a few tribes, such as the Grand Traverse Tribe of Michigan and the Navajo Nation have **passed** anti-predatory lending legislation. But more must be done in order for Native voices to be heard. That is why **NAIHC** will continue working with **policy** makers to find adequate solutions to the **problem of** abusive and predatory lending. And, my tribe will support NAIHC, as there is so much more **to** be done.

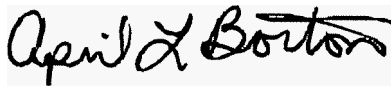
For all those in charge of **protecting** and enhancing the scope of the CRA, we hop you will **recognize** that any investment in Native homeownership is an investment **in** the self-sufficiency of Native people. Aid given to Native people should not be **seen** as a "handout" because the government has **trust** responsibilities and as representatives of a hugely valuable act, we urge you to recognize **that across** America, homeownership results in more stable communities and increased community involvement. Meanwhile, growth in home equity allows people to **earn** a larger and more reliable return **than** most other investments, which empowers people by **encouraging** entrepreneurs.

The proposed changes to CRA stand to severely affect Native American homeownership, potential economic opportunities, and access to banking services. Furthermore, such changes would provide abusive lenders more leeway in **getting away** with their predatory lending practices.

Therefore, accepting these changes would be a variation on the Robin Hood tale: **take** opportunities **from the poor**, or underserved, and reward the **rich**, or banks. That is why we strongly urge you to decline **the proposed** changes and ensure the CRA is a **fair** and efficient act for those who need **it** most.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



April L Borton  
Housing Manager

cc:

National Community Reinvestment Coalition  
President George W. Bush  
Treasury Secretary John W. Snow